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NEW YORK, MARCH 17 (AP)-JAMES B. DONOVAN, WHO JOURNEYED BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN TO SECRETLY ARRANGE SWAPPING U2 PILOT FRANCIS GARY POWERS FOR RUSSIAN SPY RUDOLPH ABEL, HAS BEEN AWARDED A MEDAL BY THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY. IT WAS DISCLOSED TODAY.

DONOVAN, WHO WAS COL. ABEL'S COURT-APPOINTED ATTORNEY AT THE RUSSIAN'S SPY TRIAL, ALSO RECEIVED A LETTER FROM PRESIDENT KENNEDY PRAISING HIS "SKILL AND COURAGE" IN THE SWAP NEGOTIATIONS.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE MEDAL AND LETTER WAS CONTAINED IN AN ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE NEW YORK CITY BOARD OF EDUCATION WITH THE PERMISSION OF DONOVAN, ITS VICE PRESIDENT.

DONOVAN COULD NOT BE REACHED TONIGHT FOR COMMENT.

THE ANNOUNCEMENT SAID THE CIA'S DISTINGUISHED INTELLIGENCE MEDAL WAS AWARDED TO DONOVAN AT A PRIVATE CEREMONY LAST TUESDAY. CIA DIRECTOR JOHN A. MCCONE MADE THE PRESENTATION AT THE DIRECTION OF PRESIDENT KENNEDY.

ACCOMPANYING THE MEDAL WAS A CITATION SAYING OF DONOVAN: "HIS UNIQUE ACCOMPLISHMENTS REPRESENT A CONTRIBUTION OF GREAT VALUE TO THE CIA AND TO THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT."

THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER, DATED LAST MONDAY, SAID THE BROOKLYN ATTORNEY HAD CARRIED OUT THE SECRET NEGOTIATIONS "WITH THE GREATEST SKILL AND COURAGE," AND ADDED:

"YOU HAVE BY THIS TIME BECOME AWARE OF THE RESOLUTION IN THE CASE OF FRANCIS GARY POWERS.

"IT MUST BE A GREAT SOURCE OF GRATIFICATION TO YOU, AND I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT I CONSIDER THE RETURN OF MR. POWERS AND THE RESULTS OF THE REVIEW OF THE CASE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NATIONAL INTEREST."

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